

Marriage is in the air and on our minds.

Saturday's Royal Wedding in Windsor drew hundreds of millions of viewers around the world. Most of them were thrilled to see a young couple commit to love and to honour each other "until death do us part."

That last phrase might be what discourages many Canadians about marriage.

A recent Angus Reid poll of more than 1,500 Canadians asked, "When two people plan to spend the rest of their lives together, how important is it to you that they legally marry, meaning exchange vows in a public ceremony, whether civil or religious?" More than half (53 per cent) said it wasn't important.

The pollster drew the conclusion that a majority of Canadians now think "marriage is simply not necessary."

Is that really so? As you might expect, older people still feel that making a commitment to marry is important.

And they want to celebrate it! We witnessed this in Notre Dame Cathedral in recent weeks at our annual Masses for significant marriage anniversaries—25, 40, 50, 60, even 70 years married! Nearly 250 couples marked the occasion with family and friends.

In recent years, we have welcomed commemorations of 5, 10, 20, and 30 years of marriage because younger and middle-aged couples also want to testify to the blessings of matrimony.

This same desire to celebrate commitment is reflected deep in the poll's findings that young people 18 to 24 are more pro-marriage than their parents are.

More than half say it's important for two people who plan to spend the rest of their lives together to get married.

Most respondents viewed marriage as a more genuine form of commitment than living in a common-law relationship.

A total of 60 per cent of the people surveyed said they had been married before and 43 per cent are currently married. Forty percent of those never married claim they want to be married and others aren't ruling it out.

Not having found the right person is the most common reason for not getting married. Financial insecurity is another major concern. Three-quarters of respondents 18–34 years of age agreed that “more people would get married if weddings weren't so expensive and stressful.”

In other words, close inspection of the survey results offers more reason for hope for marriage than one might expect.

Studies overwhelmingly support the benefits of marriage for a person's well-being: greater personal happiness, financial security, and a healthier and longer life are just a few.

Indeed, the longer a marriage lasts, the more the rewards accumulate, with the only caveat being that the relationship has to be loving and supportive.

Dr. John Gallacher, a Cardiff University academic who reviewed European studies on marriage and reported on them in the British Medical Journal, noted that the happily married were more likely to eat healthily, have more friends, and take better care of each other.

“Marriage and other forms of partnership can be placed along a sliding scale of commitment, with greater commitment conferring greater benefit,” he added.

“Commitment seems to provide networks of supportive and helpful relationships, beginning with the spouse or partner, leading to more healthy lifestyles and better emotional and physical health.”

Two or three times on most Saturday afternoons between now and mid-October, the bells of Notre Dame will joyfully salute couples who embark upon marriage.

I rejoice when I hear the bells. I offer a silent prayer that their commitment will be a joy they can share with family and friends “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health” all the days of their lives.

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